

10. THE BYELORUSSIAN ELEMENT

The Byelorussian emigration in Western Germany is split at the present time into two major contending groups; the parties and movements associated with the Byelorussian Government in exile under (President) Mikola Abramchik and those affiliated with the Byelorussian Central Council under Radislav Astrovsky. The origin of this split is to be found in the period immediately following the end of the war when there developed a bitter factional struggle between two political groupings, the radical nationalists or Krywicz*, as they were called by their opponents, and the opposition elements organized in the "Byelorussian Inter-camp Committee" which represented the less nationalistic elements of the emigration. The radical nationalists desired an independent Byelorussian state not dominated by, or under the influence of, Russia or Poland; they were not in sympathy with the Russian language and culture and wanted the Byelorussian National culture to be independent and of a western orientation. The leader of this group was Vasil Kendysh and members of this group held most of the leading positions in the newly formed Byelorussian DP camps. The first opposition to the so-called Krywicz came from the Orthodox Church. The Krywicz were denounced as fascist, pro-Polish and pro-Catholic while they accused their opponents of being pro-Soviet. The Krywicz had the sympathy of the majority of the intelligentsia and controlled the Byelorussian High School and the Byelorussian cultural and educational activities. They also had connections with the Bandera and Melnyk groups among the Ukrainians. As a counter-move to the organizations dominated by the Krywicz, their opponents created the "Byelorussian Inter-camp Committee" (BMR) at a congress of representatives elected by local camp committees held on June 28, 1947. Michael Ignatovich was elected chairman of the committee. The Krywicz reacted vigorously

* Name of an ancient Russian tribe which lived in the area of Byelorussia in the middle ages.

and organized an inter-camp committee of their own. The two opposing groups devoted practically all their energies to denouncing each other. As a matter of fact, there were no differences of opinion in regard to any political or national problem between the BMR leaders and the Krywiczzy with the exception, perhaps, that the former recognized the Byelorussian Church as legal in spite of its connections with the Patriarch in Moscow. The Krywiczzy went to greater extremes in their hatred of everything that was Russian and had a hostile attitude towards the Russian Church. Several attempts were made to unite the two contending factions but no success was had. The Krywiczzy formed a military organization, called the "Byelorussian Veterans' League" under the leadership of Kusiel to prepare former soldiers for war with Soviet Russia.

The most important organization controlled by the Krywiczzy was the "Byelorussian National Center" (BNC). Most prominent Byelorussian leaders were members of the BNC and were responsible to it for their actions. By controlling the heads of the various organizations, the BNC controlled the organizations themselves. BNC controlled thereby a large number of Byelorussian organizations including four political parties. BNC was considered as the executive organ of the Byelorussian national liberation movement and as such it took orders from the Byelorussian Government in exile headed by Mikola Abramtchik. The principal duty of the BNC was the direction of all work performed by Byelorussian organizations in the struggle for the liberation of Byelorussia. The BNC maintained regular contacts with Byelorussian organizations in all parts of the world. Early in 1948 the BNC consisted of approximately 50 members most of whom were living in the American Zone. The BNC selected a Presidium of 10 members who handled current work. Among the leading members were Vasil Kendysh, Stanislav Stankievich, Vladimir Tomaschyk, Alexis Vinitzky, Frantisek Kusiel, etc. The BNC coordinated

Byelorussian resistance to the Soviets long before the last war. Since the end of the war there has been no regular contact with Byelorussia or members of the BNC remaining there. The BNC is a member of the ABN. Vladimir Tomaschyk is the BNC delegate. The BNC is strongly opposed to any liaison with Russian organizations on the grounds that Russian organizations, including anti-Communist, still sponsor the idea of a Russian Empire dominating non-Russian nationalities. Any Byelorussian group that dared to make contact or cooperate with any Russian organization would be expelled from the BNC.

The President of the Byelorussian Government in exile, Mikola Abramtchik visited the Byelorussian DP camps in Germany in December, 1947 and January, 1948. A meeting of the leaders of the BNC took place during his visit. Abramtchik urged the Byelorussian refugees to emigrate to France. The members of the BMR opposed his activities. On February 29, 1948 the Byelorussian Veterans League held a general congress attended by 50 delegates from Byelorussian DP camps. A new administration was elected with Frantisek Kusiel as chairman. On April 24-25, 1948 the BNC held a meeting attended by the 50 members in the three western zones. All members of the "Byelorussian Inter-camp Committee" (BMR) were expelled on the grounds that they were pro-Soviet and that the BMR was a Soviet cover organization under control of the Russian Orthodox Church. The meeting adopted Krywiczy as the future name for the state of Byelorussia. The Russian alphabet is to be replaced by the Latin. The delegates were in favor of changing everything that reminded them of Russia. New officers were elected comprising: Vladimir Tomaschyk as President, M. Kunzevich as 1st Vice President and Stanislass Hrynkievich as 2nd Vice President.

On May 9, 1948 the Byelorussian Inter-camp Committee (BMR) held a

meeting for the purpose of re-activating the Byelorussian Central Council, (Bielaruskaya Zentralnaya Rada, (BZR)); the puppet government set up in Byelorussia by the Germans during the Second World War and dissolved after the German capitulation. Radislav Astrovsky who was made President of the Council by the Germans was elected President. (Dr.) Michael Shchors was chosen as Vice President; George Sabalevsky, Prime Minister; Alexander Rusak, Foreign Minister; and Vasil Hagula, President of Parliament. The meeting denounced the Byelorussian National Center (BNC) as a puppet of the Poles and the Pope and pledged itself to fight and sabotage all plans of the BNC and the so-called Krywicz movement. Shortly after the meeting the BZR requested the American authorities and IRO to recognize the new organization on the ground that it represented at least 80% of all Byelorussian emigrants. BZR has not joined the "Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations" and gravitates toward the Melnyk Ukrainian group. BZR stands for an independent Byelorussia but in close federation with Russia. It publishes a newspaper called "BYELORUSSKAYE SLOVO".

Shortly thereafter, on June 20-21, 1948 there was a meeting in the Osterhofen DP Camp of the Byelorussian Government in exile (BNR). Forty-three delegates were present including President Mikola Abramtchik. The resolution passed on foreign policy called for the reestablishment of the independent Byelorussian State proclaimed by the Council of the Byelorussian Democratic Republic on March 25, 1918. The independent Byelorussian state should be created according to its geographical borders, and should include a part of East Prussia and Konigsberg. "We should work to destroy Bolshevism and to split up the Russian Empire in order to give freedom and independence to all states presently dominated by the Russians!" "We should work for a

common and coordinated fight against Bolshevism as well as against any kind of Russian or other imperialistic idea". The resolution on internal affairs called for a more active struggle for the independence of Byelorussia. The BNR must strive to create an independent Byelorussian Catholic Church. It was necessary to unmask the activities of the BZR which was a foreign organization seeking to destroy the struggle for freedom and independence of the Byelorussian nation. The activities of Astrovsy were denounced and the groups under him were declared to be pro-Russian. On June 21, 1948, (Dr.) Vitaut Tumasch, the Prime Minister, announced the list of the 11 members of the BNR Government who had been elected.

During the past year there has been a bitter struggle between the two contending Byelorussian groups, the Byelorussian Government in exile (BNR) and the Astrovsy group. The BNR has been seeking in every way to curb the activities of the opposing group in Byelorussian circles. The Byelorussian intelligentsia which was united after the first world war, is now badly split. Astrovsy has been seeking to extend his influence among various elements such as the students. He created the "Byelorussian Central Representation" and sought its recognition by IRO as the representative organ of the Byelorussian emigrants in the American Zone. This organization has been willing to work with the Russian Orthodox Church, while the BNR group will not cooperate with any Russian organization. On the other hand, the BNR appears to have engaged in a systematic denunciation of adherents of the BZR who have been seeking to emigrate to the United States. Radislav Astrovsy appears to have a dubious past. Whether he was a Comintern Agent in Poland 1924-27 and subsequently worked for the Polish Secret Police, as asserted by his enemies, has not been established, but there is no question but that he was an adviser to the German Governor in Minsk in 1943 and

later appointed by the German President of the puppet government created by them, the Bielaruskaya Zentralnaja Rada (BZR).

The Byelorussian Government in exile has its headquarters in Paris. It claims to be a continuation of the Government of the Byelorussian Democratic Republic (BNR) which was established in Byelorussia in 1917-1918 and subsequently driven out by the Red Army. The present President --- Mikola Abramtchik -- became President on March 6, 1943 by virtue of the will drawn up on March 6, 1943 by President V. Zacharka, the third President of the Republic, who died on March 14, 1943. The present government is headed by Auhien Kachanovsky as Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, and comprises 10 cabinet posts. Subordinate to the Government is the Byelorussian National Center (BNC) which comprises a coalition of four political parties in exile, the National Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic Party, the National Independence Party and the Byelorussian Peasant Party; and the World Union of Byelorussian Emigration, headed by Leon Rydlevsky, which coordinates the work of all the Byelorussian organizations in exile. At the present time there are Byelorussian emigrant organizations in 13 countries. The representative of the BNR in Germany is Vladimir Tomaschuk.

The Byelorussian Central Representation claims to have 8,000 followers in the American and British Zones, while the Byelorussian Government in Exile claims 18,000. A qualified observer has estimated that there are not more than 4,500 Byelorussians in the American zone of whom 90% are Orthodox.